

THE EMPIRE OF THE NORTH

IT is safe to say that no development of the present war has enthralled popular imagination so thoroughly as the unlooked-for recuperative power of the legions of the Czar. It is possible also that concerning none of the eleven participants do we know less than we do of Russia; for the Russian Empire is at once the largest and the least understood of the world's great Powers.

One foot covering more than half of Europe and the other more than half of Asia, Russia bestrides the top of the world, a Colossus of two continents fated by nature herself to wield an incalculable power in the shaping of human destiny.

In terms of area alone, the Empire of the Czar covers one-sixth of the land-surface of the globe. European Russia alone is eleven times the area of France and more than fifteen times that of the United Kingdom. The population of the Russian Empire totals over 170,000,000; its inhabitants in Europe alone out-number by two to one the most populous of European states. When it is added that more than one-half of its richest area is untenanted, and that its population is multiplying at the rate of three millions a year, we begin to grasp something of the potential power of an awakened Russia.

Even though the past decade has done much for the ponderous Russian Empire, to-day her government, her institutions, her customs and her social and economic life are not yet through the transition stage which Western Europe completed three centuries ago. In no respect is this clearer than in her methods of government.

High-minded and earnestly mindful of his people's welfare though he is, Czar Nikolaus the Second is not so much the contemporary of George the Fifth of England as of Philip the Second of Spain. In spite of the Manifestos of 1905 creating the Duma an elective body representative of the people and granting a constitution, the government of Russia to-day is in practice a strongly centralized absolutism. The will and word of the Czar are law. In no country in the world to-day is there a centralization of autocratic power more inveterate, minute and excessive than that wielded on the

banks of the Neva. In the most insignificant things as in the greatest, it is the central power which commands, forbids, permits. From one extremity of the Empire to the other, not even a laundry or a lunch-room can be opened without the solemnly registered intervention of the State and the Emperor. No peasant, tradesman or workingman can travel twenty miles from home without a passport, the purchase price of which is added to the national exchequer. It is to this excessive government control, coupled too often with ignorance, indolence and venality on the part of Russian administrative officials, that much of the backwardness and unenlightenment of Russia is due.

Russia is perhaps the most uneducated of European nations. The hyper-refinement and culture of her educated classes contrast strongly with the ignorance of the masses of the people, for 79% of the population is illiterate. Government regulation of courses and teaching does much to nullify an otherwise high standard of university education, while the public and high schools of Russia leave much to be desired. But even in matters of education there are signs of promise, for the Russian mind has demonstrated superlative ability in the practical sciences, and it is characteristic of Russia's liberality toward women that the women of her well-to-do classes have shown particular zeal in scholarship.

In Russia there is no great professional, industrial and commercial middle-class such as we know in America and in Western Europe. On the one hand, and by far in the minority, is the ruling, official class and the landlords; on the other, and vastly in the majority, are the peasants—the tillers of the soil.

Commercial and industrial life is just budding in Russia. True, there are raw materials in abundance for almost every fabrication; particularly is Russia endowed with the two great agents of modern industry—coal and iron in vast deposits. To these, Turkestan adds cotton and the shores of the Caspian naphtha and petroleum. Lack of outlet to the trade-routes, save by the Black and Baltic seas, have prevented the growth of a large Russian mercantile marine with its attendant commercial